

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-07 NEA-10 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01

PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05 /102 W

----- 041502

R 071430Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY COTONOU

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8653

INFO AMEMBASSY ABIDJAN

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY BUCHAREST

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

SMEMBASSY LOME 1911

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY NIAMEY

AMEMBASSY PARIS

USLO PEKING

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

USMISSION USUN NY

C O N F I D E N T I A L COTONOU 1108

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, DM, KN, CH, AG,RO

SUBJ: KEREKOU TAKES OFF FOR PYONGYANG, PEKING AND "OTHER
FRIENDLY COUNTRIES"

1. PRESIDENT KEREKOU ACCOMPANIED BY FOUR MINISTERS AND A
LARGE ENTOURAGE FLEW OFF THE MORNING OF JULY 7 FOR STATE
VISITS TO "FRIENDLY COUNTRIES OF ASIA, EUROPE AND AFRICA" AS
OFFICIALLY DESCRIBED IN THE PRESS. GPRB SOURCES INCLUDING
MINISTERS AT THE AIRPORT TO SEE HIM OFF WERE EQUALLY CAGEY
ABOUT HIS DESTINATIONS. WE HAVE LEARNED FROM A VARIETY OF
SOURCES THAT HE WILL VISIT PYONGYANG (DESCRIBED BY ONE
SOURCE AS THE PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF HIS TRIP), PEKING,
ALGIERS AND ONE UNDISCLOSED EUROPEAN STOPOVER.
SINCE THE SOVIET CHARGE INSISTS HE WILL NOT VISIT THE
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USSR, WE WOULD GUESS ROMANIA AS THE EUROPEAN COUNTRY.

THERE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSIONS WITH ROMANIA ABOUT EXPLOITATION OF BENIN'S OFFSHORE OIL. THE TRIP WILL REPORTEDLY LAST TWO WEEKS. THIS IS KEREKOU'S FIRST VENTURE OUT OF AFRICA SINCE TAKING OVER AS HEAD OF STATE IN 1972.

2. TRAVELING WITH THE PRESIDENT ARE: MINISTER OF INTERIOR, SECURITY AND NATIONAL ORIENTATION CAPTAIN MARTIN AZONHIHO; EQUIPMENT MINISTER LT. COLONEL RICHARD RODRIGUEZ; MINISTER OF PLAN, STATISTICS AND COORDINATION OF FOREIGN AID MAJOR FRANCOIS DOSSOU; AND MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND TOURISM CAPTAIN ANDRE ATCHADE, AND SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE. WE ASSUME THAT FOREIGN MINISTER ALLADAYE WILL JOIN THE PRESIDENT'S PARTY EN ROUTE. THE PRESIDENT WAS ACCOMPANIED BY AN ENTOURAGE LARGE ENOUGH TO FILL THE CHARTERED 707 (THE AIRCRAFT WAS CHARTERED FROM A COMPANY NAMED TEMPAIR).

3. COMMENT: KEREKOU'S WILLINGNESS TO ABSENT HIMSELF FROM BENIN FOR TWO WEEKS IS A CLEAR SIGN OF CONFIDENCE THAT HIS REGIME HAS THE COUNTRY UNDER ITS FIRM CONTROL. THE WAGS IMMEDIATELY STARTED ASKING IF KEREKOU WOULD STILL BE HEAD OF STATE BY THE END OF HIS TRIP. HE MAY HAVE ASKED HIMSELF THE SAME QUESTION AND FOR THAT REASON TOOK AZONHIHO, HIS PRINCIPAL RIVAL, ALONG WITH HIM AS HIS INSURANCE.

4. BY THE COMPOSITION OF THE DELEGATION IT IS EVIDENT THAT BENIN REGARDS THE TOUR AS AN AID HUNTING EXPEDITION.

5. FROM OUR POINT OF VIEW THE VISIT WILL CERTAINLY NOT BE HELPFUL IN FOSTERING BETTER U.S.-BENIN RELATIONS. THE HONEYMOON PERIOD WITH THE LOCAL PRESS (I.E. RELATIVE ABSENCE OF VEHEMENT ANTI-U.S. PROPAGANDA) IS PROBABLY OVER. STORIES EMANATING FROM THE VARIOUS STOPS ON KEREKOU'S ROUTE CAN BE EXPECTED TO CONTAIN A FAIR SHARE OF ANTI-U.S. JARGON. KEREKOU IS LIKELY TO ALLOW HIMSELF TO BE USED, PARTICULARLY BY THE NORTH KOREANS, TO MAKE STATEMENTS OR AT LEAST AGREE TO A JOINT COMMUNIQUE INIMICAL TO OUR INTERESTS. WE ALSO EXPECT THE ASIAN COMMUNISTS WILL PROBABLY BE ABLE

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TO DO A JOB IN HIM AND HE WILL RETURN FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT BENIN'S FUTURE LIES WITH THE COMMUNISTS.
CHESHES

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